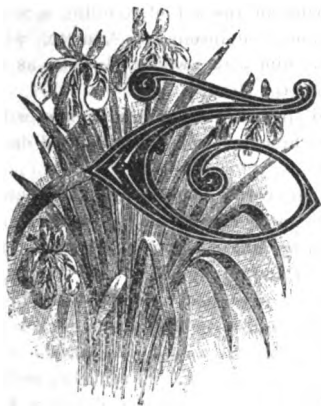


## IN ST. TAMMANY PARISH.

BY MISS ALICE BOWMAN, AUTHOR OF "CREOLE BLOSSOMS," ETC.



### I.

HE scenery of St. Tammany Parish, which stretches northward from the upper shore of Lake Pontchartrain, is peculiarly varied.

There are graceful winding streams,

coursing between banks of white sand, and shadowed by moss-draped woods of oak, hickory, and magnolia; there are clear springs rising in tangled glades, and lying like great cups of cold water within green-grassed rims; there are savannas all set with rainbow-colored flowers, spread like soft carpets under the trees; there are laughing hills, and swamps of cypress, and sweeps of pine woods, where one may wander at will over the clean needle-sprinkled land, and among tall purple-tinted pillars—fairer far than any fashioned by man.

Odd bits of human life have strayed hither—all seekers—gold-seekers, one might call them—taking gold as the emblem of all that which is most precious to each—bread, health, forgetfulness, solitude.

For the greater part, those who are bread-seekers have, as the years roll on, developed into a people physically thin and yellow, mentally stoical, dreamy, and content, seldom rising above the log house, the patch of corn, and the field of yams, and owning, perhaps, a drove of unfed, unhoused cattle, wandering wild. For the rest, misanthropes, invalids, neglected scholars—many have gone to their long sleep. They lie unsung, save by the pines sighing above their unknown graves.

But, beside all these, there are a few who love the depths and the streams and the woods of St. Tammany, who seek there the gold of pleasure, angling in the deep streams, drinking from the cool springs, breathing the resin-

scented air, and galloping through the clean pine aisles.

Macdonald Osborne was one of these. An old uncle had bequeathed him his fortune and the rough hunting-lodge in St. Tammany, where he had dwelt thirty years. Enamored with the charms of St. Tammany, Osborne wandered over the wild country, enjoying a sense of freedom eminently grateful to an independent nature.

About ten days after taking possession of the old lodge, he one morning lost his way, and, while seeking a short cut to the Tangipahoa River, struck a gray fence. It trailed, snake-fashion, first through the pine pillars, then down a slope of oaks and magnolias into a bit of lowland, and over a trickling stream, up again through a copse of dwarf oak bushes, thence into open land, where tall uncut grass stood in an apparently deserted field. The June sunshine spread like a golden flood over the still level of the field. There was scarce a breath of air stirring, and the heat burned intense.

Osborne tramped along with seven-league strides. He lifted his clear brown eyes and looked forward, shifting his rod as he walked. A green mass of foliage stood silhouetted against the blue sky.

"Shade at last," he muttered, and was about to climb the low gray rails, seeking these denser woods, when lo! the fence-trail broke, and he found himself in a broad lane, grass-grown like the fields, save for a foot-path threading the centre, and marked either side by the faint sign of wheels. Beyond the roadway, stretched another field, shut in by another gray fence, and lying tawnily naked in the blinding light.

Osborne looked up the straight lane. It was hedged either side by wildly growing blackberry bushes—a few late berries yet hung among the thick leaves. The whole might have been taken for a study in yellow—so glowed the sunlight, so still each leaf, so still all the world. Osborne could hear only the sighing of pines, and, after a little, the faint drowsy crow of a cock. Far ahead, at the end of the lane, he could see another gray fence of smooth planks laid lengthwise, with great spaces between, and, beyond these, trunks of trees and shadows and long moss-trails droop-

ing still in the dark depths, and, back of all, a large house, framed and clasped by the low-hanging boughs of the great trees.

A dog barked as he yet tramped onward, and then, gazing forth from the shadow of his broad hat-brim, he saw a woman appear in a wide-opened doorway, step out on a broad gallery, shade her eyes with her bared hand, and look forward.

"An enchanted palace," thought Osborne, while he pushed open a big rickety gate and passed among the moss-draped shadows. "Rather a gloomy princess," for the woman was tall, slender, and dressed in black.

He walked now on a broad bricked path. so green and slippery from growth of moss that it was with difficulty his great hunting-boots kept footing. There were ferns growing beneath the trees, and there were also patches of bare yellow ground, for the soil here was the yellow clay soil of the pine-lands, and verdure did not thrive in these shades. Tiny flecks of sunlight sifted down, here and there, on the moss-grown walk. A gray-white dog—a spectral creature—came forward, sniffed suspiciously at his boots, then turned and walked by his side. The house loomed dark and large before him—quiet, still, gray—the roof lost among branches overhead. It was a great double house, built of wood. The white paint of walls and the green paint of window-blinds, time had merged into a soft pale-drab, tinted, here and there, by green mold.

As Osborne approached nearer, he saw another figure, passing slowly back and forth close by the gray house-wall—a woman's figure, monotonously moving from end to end of the long gallery. When he had reached the steps, he looked up, took off his hat, and stood a moment almost hesitating. He had been something of a traveler—had met with many varied experiences, had thought himself proof against surprise—and so perhaps was somewhat dismayed, finding himself a bit startled by his surroundings and a bit awed by the clear dark eyes and pale face and questioning gaze of the tall woman before him.

"Pardon the intrusion—I have lost my way," he said, at last, in answer to these questioning eyes. "I was hunting for the Tangipahoa, and—"

"And you have come very near the Tangipahoa," interposed the tall woman, in a clear cool voice. "It lies just there," lifting her long white hand and waving it westward.

The gesture was one of dismissal, and for such probably most men would have taken it;

but Osborne was rather different from most men.

"The sun is overpowering. Can I find a sheltered way for reaching the river? Will you allow me to pass through your grounds?"

He looked wistfully down the gentle slope, all shaded with tall trees and at whose foot he thought the river must lie.

"Lucretia, daughter, why don't you ask the gentleman in? And why don't you tell him that he can pass through the grounds here?"

The thin querulous voice came sharply through the stillness. The walker had paused in her monotonous motion. She held a large rubber ring in her thin hands; it was attached to a string, and the string was hung by another ring to a long wire fastened against the wall near the ceiling. Osborne's amaze, as he noticed this, passed away when he saw the face, now turned toward the daughter; the eyelids were closed—the mother was blind.

"You can take your way through the trees, if you prefer," said the daughter, in her clear vibrating voice. It sounded like an echo—an echo of something dead and gone. And the eyes—they were like the echoes of looks that had died.

Osborne felt attracted yet repelled.

"Thank you," he responded, with a courteous smile. "And, before I go, will you kindly give me a glass of water?"

"There is a spring of fine water near the river," she replied. "You pass it as you go through the trees at the foot of this hill."

"Lucretia," again called the mother, "Lucretia—what do you mean?"

"Only, mother, the water is cooler and sweeter than any we have to offer. But—" here she paused an instant—"but I will give you the water."

She moved away into the broad hall beyond, and, as Osborne mounted the old steps, he could see her lithe stem-like form distinctly outlined. The hall extended straight through the great house, the double doors beyond were wide opened, and a deep vista of sunlight served for background. Thrown as on yellow canvas, the black figure moved hither and thither.

"Take a seat, pray," said the mother. "No, do not trouble yourself—I can find my chair, although I am blind. I have found it many years. And so you have lost your way? Ah, young men are not the woodsmen they used to be! How far have you come?"

"I cannot tell, madam," replied Osborne, who had stood his rod against one of the moss-tinted pillars and had seated himself on an inviting

settee of bamboo. "Perhaps, as the bird flies, scarce three miles."

"Scarce three miles? Our nearest neighbors are three miles distant—Kallade, the drover—Gilbert Kallade, the holder of a stock-farm. Do you stay with him? He has a pretty set of cattle."

"No," replied Osborne, marking the keenness of the face expressively turned toward him. "I—"

But, just here, the tall daughter advanced, and her thin white hand held forward a goblet all misted with the coolness of the water within. Osborne noted the slender finger-tips, and, through the mist, noted the cleanly-cut flowers of the crystal vessel.

"Very aristocratic and dainty. Lovely glass. Never saw such queer people," he thought, as he drank. Then aloud: "Thank you; I don't think any spring can give cooler water. Let me save you the trouble." And he walked into the hall and stood the glass on an old mahogany sideboard.

He had time for one glance down the long walls. They were hung with portraits. It was an odd fancy—but somehow, it seemed to him, there were lines and lines of white faces looking out from gloomy depths, and the eyes were filled with a whispered calm, like echoes caught from hushed lives.

"You will have no difficulty in finding the river if you go directly down the slope," said the clear voice, which would never again quite leave his ears.

"Thank you," replied Osborne. "Pardon if I have intruded. Perhaps, some day, ladies, you too may lose your way; and—allow me—I am your neighbor, as neighbors go in this part of the world. If you did not know my uncle, you probably have heard of him, in his secluded life. I will leave my card."

The standing figure did not stretch forth her hand to receive the bit of pasteboard. But Osborne would not be rebuffed: he called up the smile whose winning brightness had conquered many hard hearts, and, as he laid the card on the arm of the blind woman's chair, said in his rich voice:

"I am Macdonald Osborne."

He did not look at the blind mother; he looked, rather, into the white face of the daughter, and met calmly the cold gaze of her dark eyes. He hoped she would give her name in return; but, as she did not, he took his rod, picked up his discarded hat, bowed, and, with renewed thanks, slowly descended the gray steps.

As he passed under the shadows, he fancied he heard his name repeated in the querulous voice of the blind. He turned and looked back; the daughter was bending over the mother's chair; he could see her dark head beside the white cap.

A whiff of wind blew the moss-trails—grew strong and stirred the ferns at his feet. When he moved to go on, two bits of white pasteboard came dancing among the green fronds. Osborne looked, and then looked again; the bits of white danced along like two little fairies—both nestled coquettishly against the green of a low cluster, then danced off again, whirling and waltzing among the bending fronds.

Osborne blew a long low whistle.

He had recognized his card, torn in half.

He whistled a second time, and then he laughed—a queer little laugh, like a challenge.

It tinkled faintly among the arched boughs above, and died away long before it had reached the gray gallery.

## II.

THE Tangipahoa waved like a broad watered blue ribbon between its dark wooded banks—not very wide here, beyond the sloping hill stretching down from the gray house. The slope and the walk were longer than Osborne had anticipated: perhaps because he had not gone in a straight line, but had advanced rather in a slanting direction and toward the foot of the field stretching on the other side of the broad lane. However, the woods were pleasant—a green twilight most refreshing—and the breeze which had stirred on the slope still followed him as he walked.

An old log, extending into the blue river, presented itself, after awhile. There were deep waters lying about the further end, and luscious green leaves floating boat-like nearer the shore: altogether, a tempting and promising spot for an angler. Osborne set his great boots on the slippery surface. He was very sure-footed—had climbed mountain rocks where others had failed. But the most expert fall sometimes, and so it happened that this very confident, brave, and daring American found himself suddenly astride the brown log, his feet dangling either side in the clear water, his rod, caught tantalizingly in vines above, snatched quite from his careless grasp. He presented a picture of a thoroughly astounded and demoralized fisherman: for truth compels me to add that the jar of the fall had thrown his hat on the back of his head in that very unbecoming and dissolute style adopted by most inebriates.

Now, when people fall, they seldom rise at once—they generally glance around, as if seeking the cause or the number of eyes that have witnessed the accident. Certainly, the latter consideration could not have influenced Osborne, as he sat an instant turning his eyes above and below, regarding the rod dangling above, the feet dangling below, and the little waves circling around, quite as if his boots had been stones cast into the clear river. Yet, as he looked, a laugh, so faint and malicious that it might have been the echo of the one he had sent forth on the slope above, came tinkling and fairly twinkling about his amazed ears.

He glanced upstream and downstream, slowly settled his hat on the top of his brown locks, as slowly and with all the dignity possible drew his boots from the water, and, profiting by experience, carefully set them on the treacherous log, dexterously disentangled the dangling rod, stood a moment winding the loosened line, and then walked downstream. He had seen a large gray mill rising amid the foliage below and standing on piles in the clear water. He felt curious to know who had witnessed his downfall and who had tossed that odd little laugh over his discomfiture. It had come from the direction of the mill—probably there was someone in the old building; at any rate, it was a picturesque spot, and he was exploring.

Approaching nearer, he saw that the mill was a ruin. The huge water-wheel had stood quiet so long, that green mosses draped the great spokes, and grew like miniature garden shrubbery on the broad still rim. The planked way leading to the upper story was very old, the boards loose, the piles supporting them slanting in a graceful weary way, as if tired of the long-borne burden.

Osborne, remembering his late downfall, advanced cautiously. He was surprised, stepping at last beneath the roof, to see the extent of the building—was truly amazed at the beauty of tint and coloring. Far above, the roof shot upward in a sharp ridged point, extending across from end to end. All the spaces overhead, filled with rafters rising beyond rafters in intricate confusion, were draped and hung with the tender greens and browns and deep-reds of fern and moss; birds, apparently disturbed as he entered, flitted hither and thither about their hidden nests; two long sunbeams, glinting down from holes in the old roof, seemed as the poles of Jacob's ladder, pointing heavenward. Below, disclosed twixt the old gray logs of the floor, set far apart, and dressed here and there with moss and fern, like the rafters above, poured

the flood of blue water—a dulcet song, breathing upward as it circled about the gray piles below.

Osborne, a keen lover of the beautiful, stood like one entranced. There was a look of reverence tempering his strong face. He walked slowly forward and gazed about, like one entering the hallowed aisles of a strange cathedral.

A pile of boards arose before him, and two square slender posts shot up straight toward the roof. The boards had evidently lain there a long time, for they were almost a bank of lichens, the clinging tendrils so exquisitely delicate that the explorer felt almost sorry as he climbed among them with his great boots. He hurriedly vaulted over, took one step forward, then stood, slightly opening his brown eyes. He had quite unexpectedly stumbled on a bit of human life—a girl looking at him fearlessly from the depths of opaline eyes, the upturned face gleaming white from a frame of red-gold hair. She was seated on the floor, leaning somewhat against the pile of moss-grown boards.

"I beg your pardon," said Osborne, hastily pulling off his hat. "I did not know there was anyone here—or at least—"

"Don't stand there," interrupted the girl, in a clear voice and without evincing the slightest embarrassment. "That floor is unsafe. When you walk, take the sleepers. You may fall into the water below."

Osborne moved.

"Thanks for your advice. I have already had one fall," he continued, quite confident, as he spoke, that the girl before him had tossed that little laugh over his downfall.

"Yes—I saw you."

"You certainly had a fine view of the disaster," responded Osborne, turning to glance upstream through the wall of the mill, which, at the upper end, was quite open.

"Oh, yes. And you've no idea how comical you looked, astride of that old log. I wondered if you didn't feel—" here a little ripple of laughter—"I wondered if you didn't feel as if you had gone back to the days of your babyhood, and were riding your grandfather's cane—of course, on an enlarged scale," she added, as in after-thought.

"Horrid little witch," reflected Osborne, and he bit his lip while she talked.

"I suppose, then, it was you who laughed?" he asked, aloud.

"I suppose it was. I generally laugh when I see anything to laugh about," she continued,

indifferently. "I am quite unconventional—I have grown up like a weed. Oh, look—it is almost out. The shell has opened."

She had not regarded him while talking, but sat bending her gold head forward and gazing intently toward the square pillar.

"What is almost out?" inquired Osborne, approaching and looking curiously on the spot among the mosses where her regards seemed fixed.

"Why, the cicada. Don't you see?" and she pointed a white finger toward a dark spot showing now distinctly in the brownish moss. "He's been so lazy. I've been here more than an hour, waiting for him to break forth. I just love to watch them. I found this one wriggling about in the lane, and I knew what he wanted. I knew he was trying to get out of his shell, and I thought I would bring him here and let him break out of his chrysalis in a prettier place than the lane. See, see—the wings are just beginning to show. They are beautiful—like thin gauze—like a lovely ball-dress. He is going to make his debut, like the girls I read about in story-books."

"I can't see very well," said Osborne, bending forward a little.

She moved her eyes an instant, and looked toward him.

"Why don't you come nearer? Take care. Here, you can sit by me, and then you can watch. Don't be afraid. The floor is strong here—old cypress planks. Now— isn't that better?"

"Decidedly," acquiesced Osborne, as he settled himself on the cypress floor by the girl, and leaned against the plank-pile.

I think, after he had laid aside rod and hat, he quietly pinched his arm, to see whether he was dreaming.

"Decidedly," he repeated. "What a beauty he will be. Do you often watch them?"

"Oh, not so very often. But," here a white hand, which Osborne thought looked familiar, brushed back a few stray locks falling like streaks of gold over the white forehead, "but I feel to-day as if I looked at myself."

"At yourself?"

"Why, yes," said the girl, lifting her opaline eyes and gazing calmly into his questioning face. "This is my birthday; I am eighteen to-day. Don't you see? I am, as it were, breaking out of the chrysalis, from childhood into womanhood. I am a grown woman to-day."

"A woman?" inquired Osborne, lifting his brows. She did look so very childish, sitting there and nestling her red-gold head against the mosses.

"You don't believe me. Ah, that is because you have not seen how tall I am. Just look."

She arose, shooting upward gracefully into the tender light. Her blue muslin gown fell in soft folds about the slender lissome figure. She was indeed tall, and, as Osborne looked up and she looked down, like a flower bending on a stem, she seemed, in height at least, a woman.

"Yes," he said, answering the earnest interrogation of her grave eyes, "yes, I see you are quite a woman in stature. But the mind," assuming an air of sober wisdom and half rising as the girl reseated herself, "the mind—"

"Oh, we Magruders all have tall bodies, and clear good minds to correspond," she answered, carelessly. And then, as if quite forgetting his presence, she bent her head and eyes on the now fast-opening chrysalis, saying thoughtfully: "I wish I had a dress like those wings."

"Would you wear it on your birthday?" asked Osborne, looking down as he leaned against the high pile of boards.

"I would wear it right now."

"What! here in this mill?"

"Here in this mill. Why, where could you find a prettier place?" she queried, turning her head toward him and again fixing him with her scintillating eyes.

"Nowhere," answered Osborne, glancing above and below. "It is the prettiest ruin I have ever seen; not grand, but just lovely. Just—"

"Just what?"

"Nothing," said Osborne, biting his lip under his mustache. He had intended saying: "Just a fitting temple for your beauty"; but somehow the words spoken to that unconscious soul seemed profane.

"I don't like people to commence saying something, and then stop; it sounds deceitful. We Magruders are never deceitful."

"It seems to me, 'we Magruders' have a great many rare qualities," said Osborne, gravely, while regarding her with amused eyes. "Tall, with minds corresponding to the great height, and not deceitful; quite a superior race altogether."

"It's true—every word. I don't care to talk any more; only—" She paused a moment; her face was flushed.

Osborne could see that she was very angry, and hastened to apologize.

"I beg your pardon—I was rude, though not intending to be rude. I do enjoy your frankness. Most people think a great deal of themselves, and go about saying, like hypocrites, that they are poor miserable sinners, and all the time think themselves saints. Now, really I should

not like to tell you or anybody else now—horribly conceited I am. I really believe I think myself superior to all the world. I think I might have been a Napoleon or a Washington, if the circumstances surrounding their lives had surrounded mine. There—I shall make no more confessions. I hope I have said enough to convince you that my conceit quite matches the Magruder conceit."

"But we are not conceited. Now listen: We are horribly stubborn; we are bitter enemies; we don't forgive. God cannot love us, I think." She was looking sadly now into the blue waters, singing below their soft song. They seemed murmuring a sweet accompaniment to her low words, spoken almost in the voice of one dreaming. "I think sometimes that is why our bodies are stricken in the very core of our being. We are consumptives. Years ago, grandfather came to these pine-woods with his ten beautiful girls and boys. The eldest was a girl of my age, and she was fast passing away. Physicians said the pine-air would perhaps restore her health; so grandfather built a big house and lived here. But the pines didn't help very much; they all lived, those girls and boys, to be women and men. My father was forty when he died. They all tried other lands; but they all came back here to die. There's only Aunt Lucretia left now; she's thirtyfive. I suppose she'll go too, after awhile; at least—Oh, but I forgot"—here the girl looked up, a swift color rising in the dismayed face—"you. It must seem odd for me to talk to you in this way. Aunt Lucretia would be displeased, and—"

"Aunt Lucretia?" interrupted Osborne, who had silently listened to this strangely-proffered family history. "Do you live in a large house, not far from here?"

"Of course. Where else should I live? You didn't think I lived in the mill, did you?"

She lifted her brows as she spoke, making of them two dark interrogation-points on her white forehead.

"I was at your house, this morning," said Osborne. "I lost my way, and went there to find it. I saw two ladies. One of them was blind."

"Yes—grandmother. She became blind when Aunt Lucretia was a young, young girl—only fifteen; and then Aunt Lucretia took care of the house and of everybody—even of me. She was just seventeen when I was brought to her. Oh, dear! I wonder whether I shall grow to be like Aunt Lucretia," and she brushed her hand over her forehead with a singularly graceful gesture, as if driving away an uncomfortable thought.

"What do you mean?" asked Osborne, with interest.

"Oh, I don't know—still and quiet and sad and deep and—I can't explain. Somehow you never can understand Aunt Lucretia. I suppose—well, you see this lovely creature. He's all dressed in thin gauze, and he has jewels on his head, and he's all full of soft hues that no one in the wide world can imitate. Well, in two days all that will be gone. He will be dressed in gray-black, and the jewels will be like jet, and the hues will be just like clear dark ice, and—oh, well! I think Aunt Lucretia was once what my beauty here is, and now—" she shrugged her shoulders slightly, put forth a white finger, and touched the soft gauze wings.

"Now," interposed Osborne, taking up the broken thread of her speech, while a vision of the dark figure, standing forth against the background of sunlight, arose before his mind, "life has made her calm and sad—it has clothed her in garments of care, and—"

"There—there! See! It is out—quite out, and I am eighteen—and—"

"But," interrupted Osborne, looking into the uplifted face, all sparkling and brilliant with delight, "does your life lie behind you, like that dark ugly shell? Have you not sweet memories of childhood?"

The girl knotted her white brow as in thought, looked out down the sunlit river, and answered gravely:

"Yes—oh, yes; but I think I want to see the world. I want to know life. Sometimes I drop little chips into the water there below, and watch them float away, and wish I could follow them out into the broad ocean, and over to Italy. My mother was from Italy—ah! there he goes—there he goes. See the beauty—I wonder whether I shall ever go out into the wide world. I wonder whether that is given me as a sign. Generally, they stay ever so long, just where they come from the shell. Look how he floats out into the sunlight. Ah, he is gone—he is gone."

In her eagerness, she had risen, and she stood pointing forward her white hand, her eyes following the glistening creature as it spread the newly fledged wings in the June sunlight. Osborne, standing beside the excited girl, fancied he could almost see her soul leap forth, soaring beside the fluttering jewel. As it disappeared, she sighed, passed her slender hands over her brow, and, stooping, picked up a straw hat, which she settled over the gold hair.

"I must go now. My clock says it is time. Those two sunbeams are my clock," and she looked at him with laughing eyes. "I know just where they fall, each hour of each month. I think it is the prettiest sun-dial in all the world."

"Do you," said Osborne, gravely, "do you, indeed, take that black shell as the emblem of your past—as the emblem of your childhood?"

He pointed to the split shell, clinging black on the brown and green moss.

"It is ugly," she said, stretching forth her white hand and drawing the dead legs from the moss, which they yet clutched as if living. "So—go."

She dropped the little dark hollow case through the opened floor, looking down as it fell into the distant water.

"I cannot say that it is the emblem of my childhood," here she looked with thoughtful eyes, from under her hat-brim, into Osborne's expectant face; "I cannot say so, for there was Aunt Lucretia."

"And do you love her?"

A quick gleam of surprise flashed over the girl's features, and, as she turned to move away, she said softly:

"Aunt Lucretia was father and mother and all to me. I—I have done wrong—" for the first time, Osborne detected a tone of embarrassment in the young creature's voice. "I ought not to have talked to a stranger—Aunt Lucretia will be displeased. Only it seemed—"

"Seemed what?" asked Osborne, as she stopped and played nervously with a little silver whistle, which she had drawn out by a blue ribbon from the folds of her dress.

"Well—I suppose I was lonely, and it seemed as if you had come to pay me a birthday visit, and I forgot myself, and talked—talked just because it was my birthday, I suppose—and as I ought not to have talked to a stranger. Very silly—wasn't it?" she asked, shrugging her shoulders.

"Well," said Osborne, "so I am a birthday visitor."

"Ah, but you didn't know."

"Of course not. However, that does not change the fact."

"What fact?"

"Why, the fact that this is your birthday; and that I have paid you a visit."

"No," she said, pushing behind her ears some straggling strands of gold hair, "and I suppose I shall always remember—because, of course, I shall always remember my eighteenth birthday. I must go now. Sambo's waiting for me in the wood below."

"Who is Sambo?"

"Aunt Sophie's little grandson. He's a little darkey who goes about with me always; and, when I need him, I blow this whistle." And she tapped her rich sweet lips with the tip of the whistle. "Good-morning."

"Good-morning," responded Osborne.

"Oh, I forgot to say, if you want to fish, just by the big wheel is the best place. You can climb down by those timbers."

"Has the mill stood this way long?"

"Yes; ever since grandfather had the big lawsuit which ruined him. You know I told you we were obstinate—obstinate and unforgiving."

She had turned back to tell about the fishing, and she stood now regarding him gravely.

"May I wish you many happy birthdays?"

"Thank you," she responded, evidently surprised at the sudden change of subject.

"And may I tell you my name, and will you tell me yours?"

"Father named me 'Lorelei.' What is your name?"

"Macdonald Osborne."

The girl's great eyes grew larger, and then a flush, like the first flush of dawn, deepened and deepened on the cheeks till they glowed even as the hot noon of that June day.

"Macdonald Osborne," she repeated.

"You seem surprised," said Osborne, somewhat taken aback by the reception accorded his self-introduction. "Have you ever heard the name before?"

"Yes." The voice now, in its cold vibration, recalled the voice of Aunt Lucretia. "Yes—it is the name of our great enemy. We Magruders do not forgive."

She turned abruptly and moved away.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

## OUR ACTS.

MAN is his own star, and the soul that can  
Render an honest and a perfect man,  
Commands all light, all influence, all fate;

Nothing to him comes early or too late!  
Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,  
The fatal shadows that walk by us still.

## A HEARTBREAKER OF CHINCAPIN.

BY HOWARD SEELY, AUTHOR OF "A NYMPH OF THE WEST,"  
"A LONE STAR BO-PERP," ETC.



HR-R-RR-RRR!

It was a singular sound—not unlike the rapid uncoiling of a broken clock-spring. I checked my horse abruptly. There was nothing to be seen on the trail-road ahead—nothing in the scant heat-laden mesquite thicket beyond. The way was dusty, the sunlight blinding, the air breathless. I had recourse to my pocket-flask for inspiration.

Ghrrr! gh-r-rr! gh-r-rr-rr-rrr!

This time there could be no mistake. I dropped my flask and struck my pony sharply with my riding-quirt. He sprang into the air as if about to leap some obstacle. At the same moment, I felt him shudder beneath me from a blow delivered with such force that the shock was communicated to my saddle. A second later, he halted suddenly, trembling from head to foot as if stricken with the ague.

There was no help for it. My predicament dawned upon me at once. With a sudden sense of helplessness, I realized that I was thirty miles from home, and that my horse had been bitten by a rattlesnake.

Nevertheless, I was on my feet in an instant. I whipped out my pocket-knife, and, before poor "Concho" was aware of what I was up to, I had lanced the wound, setting it to bleeding freely. Then I threw the bridle over his neck and turned back upon my steps, hoping to discover the reptile that had caused so much mischief.

It was some time before my efforts were successful. Hidden in the short "curly mesquite" grass, and almost identical with it in color, the hideous creature lay coiled, ready to spring. Its broad triangular head was held erect and turned backward upon its folds, regarding my movements intently, while it incessantly darted backward and forward its tremulous vibrating tongue. So suddenly did I come upon it, that for a few seconds I halted breathless as if fascinated. Then I began searching about for a stick or a stone with which to do battle with his snakeship.

Now, the singular thing about encounters with snakes upon our Texan prairies is this: that it is

almost impossible to find a missile with which to open the attack. At such times, it seems as if the ground had been picked clean of everything aggressive. Moreover, should you be so fortunate as to chance upon anything, it is ten to one that, in the excitement of the moment, you will not be able to hit the reptile at first, and the combat results in a helter-skelter skirmish, during which it is necessary to use great care to avoid stepping upon the snake in recovering the object thrown.

I had been so foolish as to set out upon my journey without a revolver, and, being now reduced to the expedient of searching for some natural weapon, I was quartering over the ground as carefully as though walking on eggs, when an equestrian shadow fell across my path, and I was hailed suddenly:

"Oh, stranger!"

I looked up. A young girl, mounted on a brown mustang, was regarding me attentively. She wore a purple jersey, which served at once to clothe and enhance the curves of a mature yet girlish figure. Her dress was of plaid woolen stuff. A bright-colored worsted cap—similar to those known at the North as "Tam O'Shanter"—covered her head, beneath which her long dark hair escaped and tossed upon her shoulders. I caught a glimpse of a silver spur attached to the boot which peeped rather saucily from beneath her habit. My eye had scarcely taken in these details of her costume when the young woman accosted me:

"What ye got there—a pet?"

"Something of one—that's a fact," I rejoined, rather amused at the query, as well as pleased at the meeting. "Have you a revolver?"

The girl eyed me narrowly a moment, backed her mustang a few paces, and then, with a toss of her head and an unmistakable Southern accent, replied:

"Natchally."

"Lend it to me," I suggested, taking a step nearer to her and holding out my hand.

She uttered a mocking laugh.

"Not much," she returned, with emphasis, wheeling her pony around smartly; "if there's any shootin' to be done in this outfit, I reckon I'm doin' it!"



"Well," said I, embarrassed as well as amused by this prompt rejoinder, but with the usual masculine contempt for a woman's prowess with the pistol, "there's a big rattlesnake over yonder; if you want to, you can practice away on him."

The girl glanced in the direction I indicated. In a few moments, her quick eye caught sight of the hissing reptile.

"I'll soon fix him!" she said, with a decisive setting of the lips. "Come around here, 'Skeeter'—what's gone with ye?" and she plied both whip and spur upon the unwilling mustang.

But for some time past "Skeeter" had been aware of something dangerous in the neighborhood—something which his timorous nature resented with attent ears and quivering muzzle. Being now urged in the direction in which the danger lay, he became very obstreperous, starting back at every turn, snorting, and otherwise expressing his unwillingness to go forward.

"I reckon I'll have to try him from here," the girl said, at length, drawing rein on the nervous animal. The snake lay coiled a few paces away.

She drew a large six-shooter from its holster in front of her saddle, and, cocking it, took deliberate aim at the reptile.

There was a breathless moment of expectation, then the heavy arm exploded with a shattering report that made the pony start back a pace or two and rear violently. The girl dropped her revolver, in her effort to control her horse. But her aim was, nevertheless, unerring. The rattlesnake was precipitated for some feet over the prairie, where he lay knitting and unknitting his helpless coils. I could hardly repress a cheer at the success of her marksmanship.

The girl gave an exclamation of triumph; then she relaxed sweetly.

"I reckon that settled him," she remarked, gazing down at the dismembered serpent. "See: I shot him plumb in two. Now, pardner, I'll trouble you to hand me thet thar six-shooter and to cut off them rattles."

She drew a small hunting-knife from a belt she wore and handed it to me, as she spoke.

I cheerfully complied. With a smart blow of the knife, I severed the rattles from the dead carcass and placed them in the dimpled brown hand she extended to receive them.

"Thet's the ninth this season," she remarked, complacently, "and, I reckon, the biggest. I expect, someday, to have one of 'em set in silver for a breastpin. How does thet strike you?"

I replied that I had seen large rattles set thus, and that the effect was very pretty. Actuated

by an impulse I hardly understood, I advanced a sudden proposition.

"I tell you what I'll do," I said, as the girl turned the rattles about in her hand, shaking them now and then in hopeless rivalry of their dead owner: "You let me have that set, and I'll get them mounted for you over at Fort Worth, the next time I go there—only let me know what name and address to send them to."

"Will ye now?" the girl replied, with a flash of pleased surprise in her bright brown eyes. "Well, thet's mighty clever of you, natchally." She tossed the rattles carelessly back to me. "Any time ye find anyone comin' up our way, all ye need do is to tell 'em to leave it for Lil Yancey at the post-office at Chincapin. Everybody knows me, and the postmaster is very careful of anything thet's left for me. Thet comes along of bein' rather gone on me, I reckon."

I overlooked this frank statement of Miss Yancey's, as I carefully wrote down name and address in a pocket-notebook.

"Ye needn't write thet all down," the young woman remonstrated, evidently in some alarm at my formality. "Though, for the matter of thet, it's all over town; and sometimes it comes in right smart handy. We're so far away here, and news don't get to us very reg'lar. Jes' now, paw and maw hev gone down to Chincapin, to spend a day or two, and I'm left all alone at the ranch. Bein' sorter lonely, I reckoned I'd take a 'pasear' on my own account."

She paused to ascertain if I grasped her facts. Finding that I did so, she was apparently about to enlighten me still further in regard to domestic matters, when her gaze fell upon my luckless mustang.

"My grief!" she ejaculated, her eyes dilating with surprise. "Why, pardner, what's gone with yer horse? He looks like he was in pretty bad fix."

I turned and regarded poor Concho. He was standing exactly where I had left him, and was indeed a most pitiful spectacle. The poison had already encroached upon his forelegs, distorting those members from their true proportions. The muscles of his chest were so abnormally swollen, that the flesh lay in huge folds, falling down and giving him the ludicrous effect of having hastily assumed a pair of trousers that were much too large for him. His lower jaw had dropped helplessly, and the wretched animal was overcome by a spasmodic and convulsive shuddering.

The girl regarded the mustang for a few moments with breathless interest; then she turned quickly to me.

"Now, we've got the boys fairly started," she remarked, "I reckon we can have a few minutes to ourselves. Are you fond of music?"

At these words, I cast my eyes about me, and was surprised to see that the room contained an open piano, on which were scattered sundry sheets of music. There were lace curtains in the windows, tastefully gathered with ribbon. A handsome Brussels carpet covered the floor. On the small centre-table stood a variegated bouquet of wild flowers.

Miss Yancey seated herself at the piano. I was greatly surprised at this evidence of her accomplishments.

"Do you play?" I exclaimed.

"Right smart!" she replied, with becoming modesty.

She ran her hands carelessly over the keys. I cannot say what Miss Yancey sang—I was not familiar with the ballad; but I was deeply impressed by the formality of her preliminaries. She gazed at me first intently, with a depth of feeling in her eyes that made my heart palpitate; then she permitted one hand to rest lightly and carelessly on mine, while she turned over the leaves of her music. I began to feel alarmed. When she finally began to confine herself to the piano, she declared melodiously that her heart was a sentimental "river that flowed to the sea"; but her manner compelled my belief that the direction of this passionate "river" was alarmingly personal; that she was a "twofold existence," but that her "soul" spent most of its time in my neighborhood; in fine, that all she "cared for or knew" was that she "worshiped me without wherefore." I was indescribably touched. But through all the fascinations of this affecting ballad, thrilled the conviction that there were four able-bodied and jealous suitors in the adjoining room who might be disposed to resent this preference by force of arms. The situation was embarrassing. I was beginning to feel very uncomfortable, when for the first I realized that we were not alone—a groan, as sudden as it was agonizing, filled the apartment. Miss Yancey sprang up in some confusion. A strong odor of bergamot permeated the atmosphere—the barber was seated in an easy-chair, in an attitude of hopeless dejection.

The supper was not a cheerful one. Although Miss Yancey gave me the post of honor at her right hand, and poured the tea gayly, and presided generally with frontier grace, the dejection of the barber seemed to have infected the rest of the company. Several times, I caught the blacksmith and postmaster exchanging glances, and even the editor seemed to have enshrouded himself in an atmosphere of gloom. Nor did

the situation improve during the evening. In vain, Miss Yancey invited her amatory contingent into the sitting-room, and, with music and animated conversation, endeavored to raise the spirits of her guests. They disposed themselves in different quarters of the room, where they maintained a stony and critical silence; seeing which, the young lady lavished most of her attention upon myself.

It was growing late, when a humorous conviction began to dawn upon Miss Yancey. As yet, not one of her Chincapin admirers had evinced the slightest disposition to return home. During the last hour or two, these gentlemen had drawn closer together—forming, as it were, a hostile camp and indulging in suppressed but apparently unfavorable comment upon our gayety. It was evident that the entire party had decided to pass the night at the ranch.

Finding that one or two ill-concealed yawns had little or no effect upon the obvious purpose of her guests, this practical young lady brought matters to an issue with her usual directness: she arose, and, taking a lamp from the mantel-shelf, lighted it in a manner which showed unmistakably that she was about to retire, and, holding it in her hand, advanced to the centre of the room.

"Pears to me, boys, none of you are reckonin' to get over to Chincapin to-night," she said; "and, there bein' so many of you, you'll hev to skirmish around natchally to find room. I'm goin' to give Mr. Brown the spare bed-room, and, when you've filled up the other ones, what's left over will hev to camp out or go in the barn. Ez for me, I've been up since sunrise this morning, and I'm going to bed."

Saying which, Miss Yancey indicated the various bed-rooms that gave upon the sitting-room and retired to her own apartment, in another quarter of the house. I did not trouble myself about the disposition of my companions; but, not finding the company particularly agreeable after her departure, I soon sought my room. Here, I made the customary brief night-toilet and threw myself upon the bed.

### III.

BUT not to sleep. For a long time, I tossed about restlessly, like one in nervous dread of his surroundings. Although fatigued by the ride of the day, I found myself scarcely able to close my eyes. A strange presentiment of insecurity possessed me, accompanied by amusing reflections upon the demoralizing tendencies of Miss Yancey's charms, as evinced by the disaffected coterie in the adjoining room.

Apparently, the same wakefulness possessed these worthies. There was no movement among them that suggested the slightest intention of going to bed. From time to time, their voices in conversation filtered through the canvas partition-wall of my bed-room. The rattle of tin cups upon the centre-table and the occasional "gluck" of a bottle—evidently passed from hand to hand—betrayed the social character of their vigil. The tenor of their remarks was manifestly depressing; and, as each speaker delivered himself of his convictions, I could hear him punctuate his discourse with abundant expectoration into the glowing grate. Not being particularly interested in their reflections, I was not giving special heed to them, when I was startled into sudden attention by the sound of my own name. I raised myself upon my elbow and listened.

"And this yer shrimp—this Brown, what do ye reckon is his game?" said a gruff voice—evidently the blacksmith's.

"Gone on Lil!" exclaimed the postmaster, in a tone of energetic conviction.

"Seen her out ridin', ye know, and, bein' struck by her style, he allowed to come up here and get the inside track of us fellers," was the jealous commentary of the barber.

"Ain't he bitin' off a leetle more than he can chew?" inquired the blacksmith again, in a tone of sarcastic disbelief.

"Wouldn't gamble on it!" rejoined the postmaster, suspiciously. "Ye seen how they kem up to the ranch—ridin' the same hoss—ex sociable and free ez ef they was on a picnic. 'Twouldn't he' mattered to Lil ef we fellers hedn't been in a mile of the place."

There was an ominous silence, evidently devoted to jealous consideration of this statement. At last the blacksmith's voice broke the stillness.

"It's gittin' too thin, Lil's cottonin' to every blamed tramp and ringin' 'em in on us," he remarked, complainingly.

"An' it ain't the keerect thing—her takin' advantage of the old man and old woman's absence to do it," said the postmaster, piously overlooking the surreptitious character of their own visit.

"And, ef she does, air we the men thet air goin' to stand it?" rose the voice of the barber, tremulous with alcoholic excitement. "What air we settin' here quiet—like so many turkles on a log—a-watchin' of him fur? What's the matter with our jest natchally histin' him out o' this, and settin' him off on his travels?"

A hum of approval and the rattling of the tin

cups on the centre-table greeted this query, amid which the voice of the editor, hitherto withheld, made itself audible:

"Thar ain't but two things, boys," he said, gravely, "thet's altogether kalculated to do the present subject justice. One of them is tar—and the other requisite is—feathers. This tender-foot hes come along here and camped on us, with the evident purpose of fascinatin' the prettiest and most attractive young woman in the Southern country. I don't take no stock in any fairy-tale about snake-bite, or anythin' happenin' to his hoss—that's all made up by him to give us fellers the go by. Natchally, it behooves us ez men, and ez friends of hern, to make an example of him to the community at large."

There was a shout of approbation from his hearers.

"Tar and feathers!" continued the editor's voice, steadily, "is the medicine thet I prescribe. An' now how's the job to be done? Thar's a chunk of the fest out thar in the wood-shed, and a brass kettle and a broom handy; but, allowin' thet you're all agreeable, where are we goin' to get the feathers?"

There were several suggestions, ill-considered and violent.

"Yes," said the voice. "Shavings is good, and broken corn-cobs is—perhaps—better, but we ain't got one, and it'd take too long to pervide the other; an', sich bein' the case, I allow thet sawdust is about our size. Thar's plenty of thet at the woodpile."

The abrupt closing of a door put an end to this unhallowed colloquy. Silence followed.

To say that I was alarmed by what I had just heard is to give but a feeble notion of my feelings. As I lay still a second, and pondered the utter helplessness of my position, a horrible nausea took possession of me that seemed to render me incapable of any movement. Struggling against this weakness, I sprang from the bed and hurried on the few articles of clothing I had laid aside, my teeth chattering, my knees smiting together in an agony of fear and excitement. For I was utterly without resource. About me stretched the bleak and boundless prairie. The village of Chincapin was ten miles away. I was unarmed. I had not even a pen-knife with which to defend myself against four able-bodied and desperate men, who had just declared their intention of subjecting me to the most inhuman indignity, if not of taking my life. And my horse—to which the frontiersman flies in all times of danger and extremity—was worse than useless, and separated from me by at least a mile of unknown country.

I was standing in the centre of my bed-room, half paralyzed by these reflections, when a sudden shaking of the window-sash attracted my attention. A new terror seized me. Hesitatingly, I groped my way to the window. In the pitchy darkness outside, I recognized some huge misshapen bulk and a cloaked figure that appeared to be beckoning to me. Half doubtingly, I raised the window. To my joy, it was Miss Yancey, enveloped in an old "slicker" of her father's and holding by the bridle the horse we had ridden together that afternoon.

"Hush!" she whispered. "You haven't got a moment to lose. The boys hev got jealous again, and hev laid off to brand you, and hev a tow-row gener'ly. It's more than I can stand, and I reckon, when paw comes back—"

She had led the pony alongside the window as she spoke. I knew by the sound of his foot-falls that his feet were muffled. As she stooped to take off the mufflers, I grasped the bridle she had abandoned and stepped from the window-sill into the waiting saddle.

With the grip of the good horse beneath me, my courage returned. In a transport of joy and gratitude, I turned to my fair deliverer.

"Don't stop for thet," she said, abruptly; "you hev'n't time!"

She appeared to be tugging at something beneath her coat.

"And here! I reckon you hev'n't any!"

She pressed her six-shooter in my hand.

"You must make a break for it," she said, breathlessly. "Ride as if Old Nick were after you. Don't stop to think of me."

"But are you safe—provided they lose me?" I asked, in my perplexity.

"Sho! they won't harm me!" Miss Lillian returned, nothing daunted. "You know they're all bos of mine—I'll keep 'em in order. Don't forget to send me thet breastpin!" she added, with a sudden feminine inspiration. "Now go, and don't shilly-shally any longer."

She disengaged the hand which I had held in

my hurried parting, and made a sudden impetuous movement as if to stampede the quiet Skeeter. Her haste was well-timed: as the pony bounded forward, the glare of a brandished torch fell full across the darkness, and I beheld the blacksmith and the postmaster just ahead of me, struggling with the contents of a heavy corn-basket.

The sudden apparition of my mounted presence for the moment disconcerted both, and, in that moment, I was upon them. A thin thicket of mesquite, through which I was moving, made it impossible to swerve aside. There was a sharp collision in the brush, the torch was extinguished, and, as I endeavored to force my way through the thorny chaparral, I realized in the sudden darkness that something was hanging to my pony's bridle. Rising in my stirrups, I used my revolver as a club, and brought it down with all my force.

The blow was given blindly, but fortune favored it. Hardly had it been delivered, when I felt the weight upon my bridle relax, and, with a crash and a bound, my horse had cleared the thicket, trampling under his feet some heavy body that fell beneath them. I was free again, and galloped rapidly away.

I did not check my horse's pace until I reached the town of Chincapin, where I left the exhausted Skeeter well-nigh foundered. Nor did I find it expedient to visit that never-to-be-forgotten locality. But, upon arriving at Fort Worth, I had a lengthy interview with the most fashionable jeweler, and, a few days later, purchased the only horse in town with an undeniable record. These pledges of my heartfelt gratitude I dispatched by messenger to Miss Yancey, and, ere long, received intelligence of their safe arrival. And I treasure, among the keepsakes which I do not show to everyone, a letter of thanks remarkable alike for its orthography and handwriting, in which I am informed that my pony, none the worse for his accident, awaits me whenever I see fit to brave again the dangers which environ this heartbreaker of Chincapin.

## UNDYING LOVE.

BY THEODORE B. DALE.

I LOVE thee, dearest, yet I feel  
My love is cast away;  
I dream of thee throughout the night,  
And hopeless am by day:  
I love thee with a love untold,  
In good report or ill,  
And, even if I love in vain,  
Dear one, I'll love thee still.

I love thee fondly, and my love  
Shall last as long as life,  
Although its bark may shipwrecked be  
Upon the sea of strife;  
And, should I know my hopeless tears  
Would sorrow's chalice fill,  
I'd drink the dregs, and, midst my pain,  
Repeat—I love thee still.